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Making sense of the sensory

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A photograph of two young children in a forest. The child on the left is a girl with blonde hair, wearing a bright pink jacket and blue leggings, smiling at the camera. The child on the right is wearing a purple hooded jacket and dark pants, and is holding the hand of the girl in pink. They are standing on a ground covered with brown autumn leaves. In the background, there are bare trees and a stone wall or fence.

Justification and
meaning for
learning and
pedagogy, and
wider understanding
of issues?

Through
experiencing nature
do young people
actively seek a
relationship or
connection with it?

Justification of learning and pedagogy

Creativity

Ownership

Progression

(Graham, 2014)

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Pedagogical *approaches*

Curiosity, exploration, inquiry,
experience, communication



Forest school?

Nature kindergartens?

Bush kinder?

Outdoor play?

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University of
Cumbria 

TEN
years
2007-2017



Smelly cocktails
 "The best activity I have ever
 done in the outdoors!" (MA
 International student, 2015)

Sensory activities: derived from writings and
 practice such as Steve van Matre (Earth
 Education) and Joseph Bharat Cornell. Now
 often not (or wrongly) attributed and many
 practitioners are devising their own activities



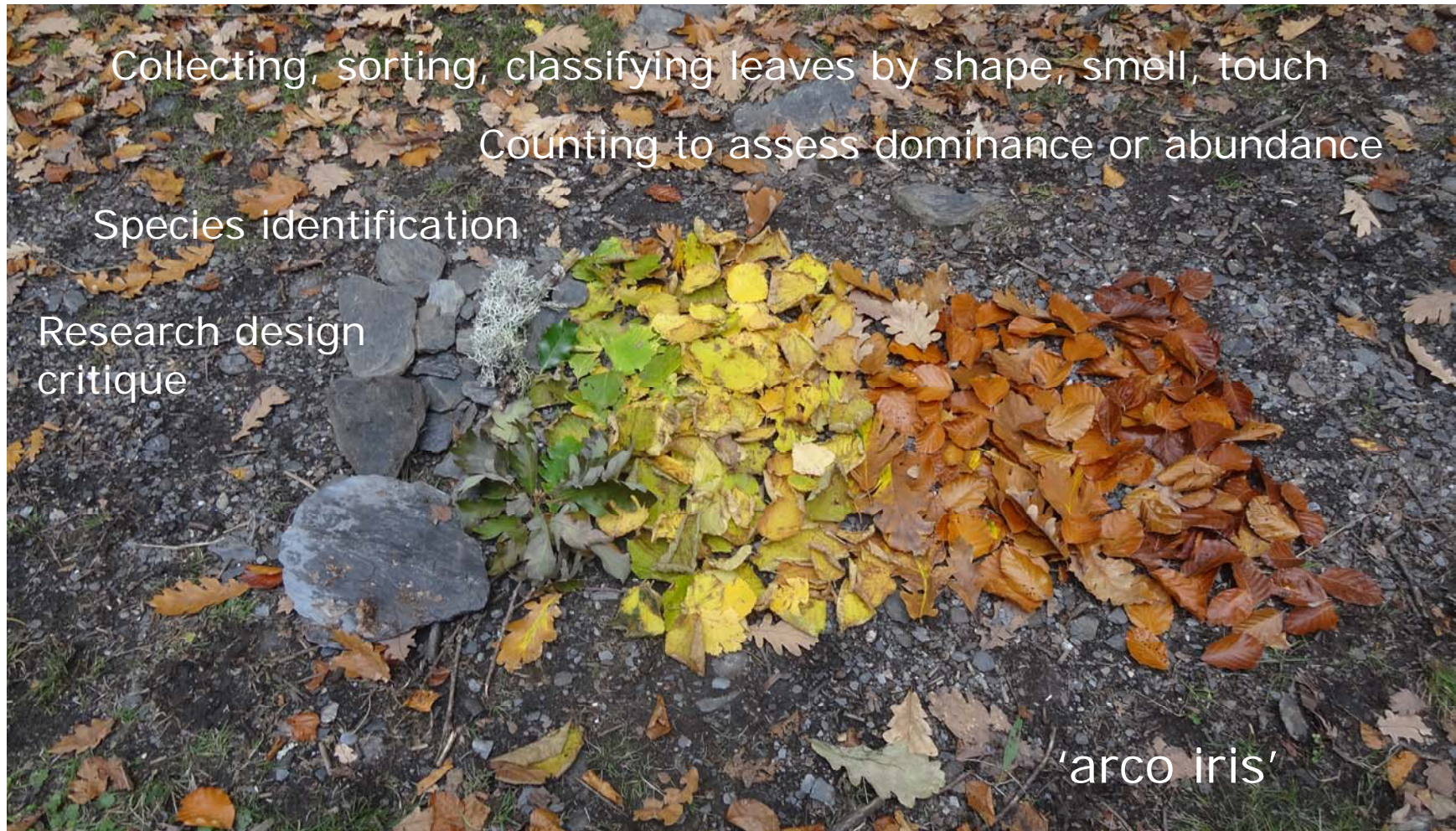
Drawing sound maps



“All young children are ever-present reminders of the fact that their senses of seeing, hearing, tasting, touching and smelling pay an incredible role in what is learned and retained” (Kalisch, 1999, p.30)

“Multisensory experiences in nature help to build the cognitive constructs necessary for intellectual development” (Louv, 2008, pp85-86)

Knowledge, understanding and awareness



Science, maths, language &
communication, creativity

Raising awareness about disabilities



Disabling the enabled

Mask making: design & technology

Observation of deprivation of a sense on other senses, body movement & cognition



Activity: Orienteering in a small area of woodland

Co-construction of narratives about equality, diversity and inclusion.

Large scale map

Score course

Creative but nauseous students!

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Relationship or connection with nature?

Experiences in nature are indispensable foundations for the individual development of attitudes and values towards the environment (Bögeholz, 2006)

Outdoor experiences that involve understanding and experiencing nature can change behaviour and attitudes and are key attributes of sustainability (Barnes & Sharp, 2004; Prince, 2017)

To enhance sustainability, education and learning must play a key role in changing attitudes and behaviour (Cooper, 1998)

'Naturalistic necessity' (Kellert, 2012)



“‘Ways of seeing’ privileges sight relative to other sensory modalities” (Macpherson & Minca, 2005)

“Touch assumes a proximal and performative form of knowledge that exceeds representation, thus breaks a distance between subject and object” (Goesser, 2014)

‘Haptic’ experiences





Colour as a multispecies sensory process or network that generates biosemiotic material effects with their own metaphorical meaning (Yates, 2013)

Concluding thoughts

Sensory activities outdoors enhance interest and motivation (as in other outdoor experiences) and cognition, although evidence is needed

Link between sensory activities and increase in pro-environmental behaviour is complex

Can be in local and familiar environments, low cost, with limited teacher expertise (survey 2017) and address core curriculum areas

Sensory v creative?



Wild is a child

*Wild is a child who stays out until dark
Wild is the child that lights fire with bark
Wild is a child with mud on their knees
Wild is the child who climbs up in the trees
Wild is a child a long way from home
Wild is the child with no need for a comb
Wild is a child who wipes their bum with a leaf
Wild is the child who uses a stick to brush their teeth.
Wild is a child who sleeps under the stars
Wild is the child who keeps tadpoles in jars
Wild is a child who fell out of a tree
Wild is the child with their own parking space at A&E
Wild is a child that I would like to be.*

Rowan Ashworth (2007 -) Winner of the Wordsworth poetry prize, 2017

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